



[Charlotte Maxeke, 1874-1939](#)

Introduction to “No Woman, No Revolution”

The efforts of women of the privileged classes to acquire rights that were increasingly being gained by the male members of their class, notably the right to own property and the right to vote, are called feminism.

This struggle existed even under feudalism, and it grew stronger as the bourgeois class began to assert itself and to become hegemonic. The feminists put forward reformist demands that bourgeois society was able, and often willing, to concede to bourgeois women.

This course, “No Woman, No Revolution”, is not designed to present a full history of feminism, but rather to pick up the story of feminism at the point where contradiction arises between bourgeois feminism, and the interests of the women

of the proletarian class.

This contradiction manifested itself in the second half of the nineteenth century, as a consequence of the proletarian revolutionary movements associated in the first place with Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. It is found, not only in the realm of theory, but also in the world of practice, notably in the First and Second Internationals.

This course has been worked on for many years. It now presents a strong view of the historical development of revolutionary thought about women, and of revolutionary organisation among women, from the mid-nineteenth century to the present.

The roots of the course are in the last decade of Karl Marx's life. The German Social Democratic Party was founded in 1875, Bebel published his "Women and Socialism" in 1879, and Marx was studying Morgan's "Ancient Society" prior to his death in 1883. Engels took up Marx's manuscript and worked it into a book, "The Origin of the Family, Private Property and The State", published in 1884, which in this course is our first and still our greatest text.

The course therefore follows the pioneering development of thought about women and revolution within the parties of the proletarian interest, from the time of Karl Marx, who died in 1883; Frederick Engels, who survived Marx by 12 years until 1895; and Clara Zetkin, who was born in 1857, and who was already active in the labour movement in 1874 (the year that

Charlotte Maxeke was born) at the age of 17. Zetkin lived until 1933.

It then proceeds via the work of Rosa Luxemburg and Alexandra Kollontai, to a high point with Vladimir Lenin, and then to the setback (for women) that was the 3rd Congress of the Third International (the Comintern).

The course then picks up the story in South Africa, where in the same decade that saw the foundation of the ANC, the ICU and the CPSA, Charlotte Maxeke [pictured above] established the Bantu Women's League in 1918, the fore-runner of many subsequent liberatory and revolutionary women's organisations.

The course problematises the relationship between attempts to found a mass-membership, dedicated women's organisation in South Africa, led by the working women; and the countervailing determination of the liberation movement, the ANC, and its Women's League, to tolerate no potential rival.

The course examines theoretical works dealing with structure and structurelessness, gender and patriarchy, and the close relationship between bourgeois feminism and bourgeois post-modernist (anti-communist) philosophy.

The course finishes with writings from the SACP (Jenny Schreiner and Blade Nzimande) and speeches from the ANC (Jacob Zuma).

[International Woman's Day](#) (8th of March each year) was proposed by [Clara Zetkin](#), a contemporary and comrade of [Alexandra Kollontai](#), at the Second International Women's Conference in Copenhagen, Denmark in 1910. The first International Women's Day was observed in 1911.

Feminism had a considerable history by that time. In 1910 the campaign for votes for women was at its height in some countries. But the bourgeois feminism of those days was being challenged by the revolutionaries, as it still is today. This course, “No Woman, No Revolution”, is motivated by revolutionary considerations like those of Zetkin and Kollontai.

A successful revolution that mobilised only half of the available support would be inconceivable. The half of the population that is female must be as fully involved in any revolution as the men are, or else there will be no revolution. Our series is designed to problematise the question of women as a force in South Africa's revolution, in the specific conditions pertaining in this year of 2016. It will focus on the necessity of organising working women as a mass.

- To download the full No Woman, No Revolution course in PDF files, [please click here](#)